Honeſty the beſt Policy in the worſt of Times,

ILLUSTRATED AND PROVED,

FROM THE EXEMPLARY CONDUCT

OF

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA,

AND ITS CONSEQUENT REWARDS;

WITH AN APPLICATION TO THE CASE OF SUFFERING LOYALISTS,

A SERMON,

Intended to have been preached at *Newport*, *Rhode Iſland*, on the *Sunday* preceding the Evacuation of that Garriſon by his MAJESTY'S TROOPS.

And afterwards preached at *St. Paul*'s and *St. George*'s Chapels, NEW YORK,

ON SUNDAY, *October* 8th, 1780,

BY GEORGE BISSET, M.A.

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M DCC LXXXIV.

ST. LUKE XXIII. 50, 51, 52.

And behold! there was a man named Joſeph, a counſellor, and he was a good man, and a juſt:

(The ſame had not conſented to the counſel and deed of them) he was of Arimathea, a city of the Jews (who alſo himſelf waited for the kingdom of God)

This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jeſus.

THOUGH virtue be at all times lovely and reſpectable, yet it appears peculiarly charming and engaging, when it is contraſted with the overflowings of ungodlineſs; when amidſt a crooked and perverſe generation, it ſhines as a light in a dark place, and when it riſes ſuperior to the ſcorn and contempt of a multitude, prone to do evil.

IT is this circumſtance that gives an extraordinary luſtre to the character here preſented to us, and which probably made the ſacred hiſtorian introduce it to us with the emphatical note of attention *Behold!* We ſhall therefore attempt to place this diſtinguiſhed character in a conſpicuous point of view; knowing that bright examples warm and invigorate the well-diſpoſed mind; and humbly hop-

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ing that we do an acceptable ſervice to our divine Maſter in endeavouring to honor thoſe whom he hath been pleaſed to honor.

And here following the order ſet us by the ſacred hiſtorian, we ſhall begin with conſidering this man's rank and ſtation in life.

Though wealth and external grandeur are by no means eſſential ingredients in a truly worthy character, yet they muſt be owned to add conſiderably to its dignity and luſtre in the eyes of men. They afford it a noble opportunity of diſplaying all its excellent qualities to the beſt advantage, and place it in the eligible ſituation of *a city on a hill which cannot be hid.* Now theſe external ornaments, which ſo evidently adorn and embelliſh virtue, were happily poſſeſſed by this man in a conſiderable degree. He was of high rank and authority amongſt his countrymen, being a counſellor, a member of the grand council of the Jewiſh nation, to which the Roman policy thought fit to leave a conſiderable weight and influence in regulating and determining the internal affairs of that province.

In our Saviour's time, the Jewiſh council was extremely corrupt both in principles and morals. It was compoſed chiefly of *Phariſees*, men of ſour tempers and

gloomy aſpects; men who had unhappily disjoined religion from morality, laying a great ſtreſs upon the ſcrupulous obſervance of forms and traditions, whilſt they neglected juſtice, mercy, and the love of God; men who made long prayers, that under a diſguiſe of outward ſanctity they might have a better opportunity to devour widows houſes. According to the teſtimony of the Jewiſh hiſtorian, who knew them well, being one of their number, they were *a cunning ſect and extremely prone to miſchief and rebellion.*

NEXT to them both in point of number and influence in that council were the *Sadducees*, men of an entirely different, though not more virtuous character. The Sadducees believed that there was no reſurrection, neither angels nor ſpirits. Far from embracing the traditions of the elders, they rejected the authority of all the prophets, except Moſes. They were generally men of rank and fortune, who, diſcarding all the hopes and fears of futurity, placed their chief happineſs in the eaſe and ſplendor, in the luxuries, and ſenſual gratifications of the preſent life.

SUCH was the general character and complexion of the Jewiſh council. And to thoſe who attentively conſider the contagious nature of vice, and the pernicious influence of bad example, it will appear a no ſmall recommend-

commendation of this man's integrity, that it received no taint nor infection from the principles and manners of thoſe with whom he was aſſociated in office, and with whom he was obliged to have frequent intercourſe—*He was a good man and a juſt.*

JUSTICE is that virtue, which reſtrains us from hurting or injuring our neighbor in any reſpect.

GOODNESS is that virtue, which diſpoſes us to promote his welfare and advantage, as much as we poſſibly can. The former tends to prevent diſorder and miſery; the latter to produce the greateſt poſſible ſum of poſitive happineſs; and both together comprehend under them every branch of ſocial duty: as from his character of juſtice therefore we may infer that he was peculiarly careful not to hurt any of his fellow creatures, in perſon, property, or reputation, that he violated no juſt right, refuſed no equitable claim, gave no cauſe to others to complain of unkind or injurious treatment on his part, or that their peace and happineſs was diſturbed by his peeviſh humor, or ſelfiſh views; ſo from his character of goodneſs we may infer ſomething far more excellent; that he was active and ſolicitous to make all around him good and happy; that he was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, a father to the poor, a friend to the friendleſs, a patron to the diſtreſſed, and that it was his conſtant

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ſtudy and delight to wipe away tears from the eye of miſery, and to make the bones which Providence had broken to rejoice.

SUCH virtues in a high ſtation are to a community, what the ſun is to this lower world, they diffuſe light, health, vigor, gladneſs; *neither is there any thing hid from the heat thereof.*

TO enhance the value of theſe private virtues ſo tranſcendently excellent, we are authorized farther to obſerve, that they were not built upon the ſandy foundation of a happy natural temper, or a deſire of fame; but upon the firm and ſolid baſis of true religion—*Himſelf alſo waited for the kingdom of God.* Religion is a *tried foundation* whereon to erect the beautiful ſuperſtructure of moral excellence; and *other foundation can no man lay.* Many excellent things have indeed been ſpoken of the innate dignity and beauty of virtue, and of its tendency to produce its own reward. Theſe ſpeculations it muſt be owned are extremely fine, and may be highly uſeful in the ſtill tranquil ſcenes of life, but the *ſtorm ariſes and they are ſcattered.* Virtue does not always bring in her right hand length of days, and in her left riches and honors; ſhe ſometimes brings in her right hand the cruel inſtruments of death, and in her left a blaſted reputation and a ruined fortune—In ſuch circumſtances what can

poſſibly keep the mind ſteady and immoveable in its regard for a form ſo devoid of external comlineſs, but the divine and noble motives which religion offers. An almighty God, the friend of virtue, and abſolutely engaged to make it finally happy—Immortal life to thoſe who patiently continue in well doing. An exceeding great and eternal weight of glory in recompence of bearing well the preſent light affliction, which is but for a moment. Animated and incited by theſe glorious proſpects, what heroic acts of virtue have not mortal men performed! They have thereby not only been enabled to reject with diſdain the moſt enchanting cup of ſinful pleaſure, but alſo to encounter adverſity and danger in their moſt dreadful forms. They have been ſtoned, they have been ſawn aſunder, they have been expoſed to the rage of wild beaſts and the violence of fire, they have wandered about in mountains, in deſarts, and in dens, hungry, deſtitute, afflicted, tormented, men of whom the world was not worthy.

FROM private virtues ſo eminent and ſo firmly eſtabliſhed upon religious principles, it is natural to expect a correſponding public conduct; and in this man our expectations are not diſappointed; as juſtice and goodneſs diſtinguiſhed the *man*, ſo integrity and honor on a moſt trying public occaſion diſtinguiſhed the *counſellor*. *He conſented not to the counſel and deed of them.*

WHAT

WHAT that counſel and deed was, we learn from the xith chapter of St. John's goſpel at the 47th verſe, *Then gathered the chief prieſts and Phariſees a council, and ſaid, What do we? for this man doth many miracles; if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans will come, and take away both our place and nation.* Through real motives of envy and hatred, but under a ſpecious pretence of public good, they determined to deſtroy Jeſus, whoſe humble appearance defeated their ambitious views of a temporal deliverer, and whoſe encreaſing reputation eclipſed theirs; and this nefarious counſel they ſoon after put in execution, with every circumſtance of violence and cruelty. But Joſeph conſented not to this counſel and deed; he could not conceive, that a perſon ſo holy and harmleſs, ſo meek, compaſſionate, and beneficent, who did not ſtrive or cry aloud, who diſclaimed all temporal authority, who was attended by no daring or deſperate followers, and who had retired into a deſart, when the multitude propoſed to make him a king, could ever give any umbrage to the Roman power; or if unjuſt ſuſpicions and jealouſies ſhould ariſe, he thought it better to leave the national ſafety in the hands of Providence, than to endeavour to ſecure it by a cruel and atrocious crime; ſuch were his ſentiments, and he had the manly firmneſs openly to avow theſe ſentiments. Had he on this occaſion attended to the dictates of worldly wiſdom it would have pointed

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out a very different conduct, "What," would it have ſaid, "will your feeble voice avail againſt the rage of the chief "prieſts and the clamors of the people? The only fruits "of your ill-timed oppoſition will be, that reproach, "ſcorn, and abuſe will be liberally poured upon you from "every quarter. Will they who are now ſhewing ſuch "a tyrannous hatred againſt the maſter, ſpare the ſer-"vant? The powerful enemies whom by your impru-"dent zeal you will raiſe up againſt you, will openly "hate and perſecute you, and depend upon it, you can "expect but little countenance or ſupport from the "weak and timid policy of your friends." But Joſeph conſulted not with fleſh and blood, he had regard to juſtice more than to expediency, and had happily laid down to himſelf one fixed and infallible rule of right conduct, *to do his duty regardleſs of conſequences.* In what manner his oppoſition was conducted we are not told, but this we know that it was prudent, firm, manly, becauſe the ſacred hiſtorian leaves us no room to doubt that it was highly acceptable to that great Being who judgeth righteouſly.

Nor was his conſtancy and perſeverance in maintaining the cauſe of truth and innocence leſs remarkable than the fortitude with which he at firſt openly eſpouſed it. As on the fulleſt conviction he had formed a good opinion of Jeſus of Nazareth, ſo his opinion of him did not

not vary with varying circumſtances, nor was his adherence to him in the leaſt ſhaken by the terrible things that he had ſeen befal him—When Jeſus was brought low even to the duſt of death, when his viſage was marred more than any other man's, when his enemies raged and were multiplied, when his friends were all diſconcerted and diſmayed, when his choſen diſciples had forſaken him and fled, when thoſe tongues which had been juſt looſed by him were ſilent in his cauſe, and when of all the people there was none with him; in this moſt gloomy hour of the powers of darkneſs, in this loweſt ſtage of the deep humiliation of the Son of God, this man was neither afraid nor aſhamed to own his attachment to him and his warm zeal for his honour. *He went boldly unto Pilate and begged the body of Jeſus.* His love to his friend, his gratitude to his benefactor, his reſpect for injured innocence could not be quenched by the deep waters of violence and wrong; and every narrow, every ſelfiſh conſideration was ſwallowed up in the generous aim, that he who had been unjuſtly numbered with the tranſgreſſors, ſhould be diſtinguiſhed from them in his death, and ſhould make his grave with the rich becauſe he had done no violence.

THERE is a maxim favorably entertained by all the friends of virtue, that *honeſty is the beſt policy*, and we ſhall be peculiarly happy in being able to prove that this

good man's caſe is not an exception, and this we muſt do by reſtricting ourſelves to ſuch rewards, as naturally flowed from his ſingular integrity, and ſuch as his ungenerous countrymen could not with-hold from him.

God by the mouth of his holy prophet had long before promiſed to his righteous ſervants, who ſuffered reproach for his name's ſake, that *inſtead of ſhame they ſhould have double.* Relying upon this promiſe, and upon a conſciouſneſs of his own integrity, we may conceive that this good man, maligned, traduced, and vilified by his contemporaries, was obliged to appeal to impartial poſterity, and poſterity has not failed to do him the moſt ample juſtice. His diſtinguiſhed zeal for the honor of his divine maſter has procured him the laſting honor of having his virtues recorded in a regiſter that ſhall not be cancelled; the name of Joſeph of Arimathea, a name once held in reproach, has now for ages ſtood foremoſt in the liſt of thoſe who have dared to be honeſt in the worſt of times. His name is as the ointment poured forth, ſweet and fragrant in all the churches of Jeſus Chriſt. Whilſt the moſt poliſhed and moſt enlightened nations of the world execrate and abhor the counſel and deed of them, they unanimouſly concur in admiring and applauding this man's conduct. Wherever the everlaſting goſpel has been preached, wherever it ſhall be preached from the riſing to the ſetting ſun, there this man's

man's integrity and fortitude ſhall be recorded for a memorial of him.

But if there are who affect to deſpiſe a poſthumous reputation, and who deny that even the ſweet voice of fame can in the leaſt charm the dark inſenſibility of the grave, to theſe it will be eaſy to prove, that verily there were to this righteous man more ſolid and more ſubſtantial rewards. And in order to this, we will, if you pleaſe, firſt ſuppoſe that a good and gracious God removed him from the *ſtrivings of the people*, and from *the evil to come*, by an immature and an early death. At that awful period when all the glories of this world faded and diſappeared from his cloſing eyes, when neither the reproaches nor applauſes of the people could in the leaſt affect him; ſure we are, that he did not repent, that he had *kept innocency and done the thing that was right*, by not conſenting to the counſel and deed of them. Whilſt men of doubtful and imperfect virtues ſtand trembling on the brink of eternity, not knowing whither they are going, mark in this perfect man the fair fruits of a confirmed integrity, *peace, hope, and a full aſſurance of an abundant entrance into the habitations of the juſt*. Who can conceive or expreſs the exquiſite joy, which muſt have filled his departing ſoul, when he reflected that the ſame Jeſus whom he had ſo cordially befriended in the loweſt ebb of fortune, was now exalted at the right hand of

of God to be a Prince and a Saviour, that all power and all judgment were committed into his hands, and that he had the keys of hell and of death? If Jeſus had laid down his life for his enemies, and in his bittereſt agonies had prayed for his murderers, what expectations might not be juſtly formed of his indulgence and favor for ſuch a choſen and approved friend. If by the gracious declaration of the goſpel, a cup of cold water given to a diſciple in the name of Chriſt was not to loſe its reward, what *an exceeding great reward* might he not humbly hope for, who had performed ſuch ſignal ſervices to the maſter himſelf. What a cordial reception might he not promiſe himſelf into the inviſible kingdom of *his Saviour, his Redeemer, his Friend.*

NEED we labor to prove this important truth, the firſt principle of all religion, that death to an honeſt man muſt in all poſſible circumſtances be great gain. The voice of nature diſtinctly whiſpers it, the voice of revelation loudly proclaims it, ſome of the moſt vicious and abandoned have in a cool moment been ready to acknowledge it, *Let me,* ſays Balaam, *die the death of the righteous, and let my laſt end be like his.*

BUT let us ſuppoſe the worſt that could poſſibly happen to this good man, let us ſuppoſe that Providence, inſcrutable in its ways, protracted his life to an extreme

extreme old age, *even in troublous times*, and that he lived to ſee that fatal period, when the juſt judgment of heaven began dreadfully to counterwork the policy of the Jewiſh council, and to make that expedient which they had pronounced to be *the political Salvation* turn out to the *intire ruin and ſubverſion* of that ſtate, by bringing upon them the arms of the Romans, to take away both their place and nation; then, when that devoted city was encompaſſed with armies, when war in its extremity of horror began to rage, when blood was ſhed like water round about Jeruſalem, and there was no man to bury them, and when within was as death; famine, faction, and the voice of lamentation and woe; in that dark and tempeſtuous evening of the Jewiſh ſtate, when thoſe who had pierced the Son of God had great occaſion to wail becauſe of him, what a cordial balſam muſt it have been to the tender and ſympathizing heart of this good man, to have the teſtimony of his own conſcience that he was *clear*, *abſolutely clear* from the great tranſgreſſion, which had involved his country in ſuch inextricable calamities; that he had neither through fear nor complaiſance deſerted her deareſt intereſts, in the critical moment upon which depended her fate; but that if his honeſt advice had been followed, Judea would have flouriſhed to lateſt ages, the pride and glory of all lands.

In our age and country a counſel and deed has been contrived and executed, in its leading features too nearly reſembling the counſel and deed of the Jewiſh rulers. A counſel and deed which has perverted the ſacred name of liberty to the vileſt purpoſes of ambition and rebellion, which has turned a land pleaſant as the garden of Eden into a field of blood, which has torn the ungrateful offspring of Britain, from the embraces of a fond and indulgent parent, the protector and guide of their youth; and has thrown them into the hands of *ſtrange children, whoſe mouth talketh vanity, and whoſe right hand is a right hand of falſehood*, who have long been the bitter and avowed enemies of the proteſtant religion, and of the liberties of mankind.

This counſel and deed, ſo unjuſtifiable in its principles, and ſo pregnant with public ruin, you, *my brethren*, have had the *virtue* to oppoſe; many of you with the loſs of all that is dear in this world. Whilſt humanity prompts me to condole with you on ſuch unmerited misfortunes, the reſpect I owe to the moral perfections of that great Being, in whoſe preſence I now ſtand, more loudly calls upon me to congratulate you upon your happy choice, as from his faithfulneſs and truth I dare pronounce, that you, like the good man recorded in the text, will at laſt find that you have acted the moſt *prudent* as well as the moſt *honorable* part. Surely it may

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be hoped that this wiſe but deluded people will ſooner or later open their eyes to the things ſo evidently belonging to their peace and intereſt: when the miſts of prejudice vaniſh, and when paſſion ſubſides, they will naturally be diſpoſed, from the fearful pit, from the mire and clay, to look up to the rock whence they were hewn. They will compare their former proſperous days, with the preſent day of gloomineſs and thick darkneſs; and, like the prodigal in the goſpel, when waſted with miſery and mortified with the inſults of ſtrangers, they will ariſe and go to their Father; they will turn their juſt indignation againſt thoſe ambitious and dangerous leaders, who have conducted them into ſuch a maze of guilt and ſorrow, and will venerate and reſpect thoſe injured characters, who have hitherto unſucceſsfully endeavoured to keep them in *the way, the good old way,* in which their fathers walked with ſongs of triumph: Should a merciful God grant to them ſuch a ſalutary but painful return of cool reflection, ſo that even the obdurate would weep over the effects of their own folly, for what would you exchange the heart-felt ſatisfaction? for what would you have your glorying made void? that you have not been acceſſary to the ruin of your country; that your integrity has preſerved you from blood-guiltineſs; that no bereaved widow, or famiſhed orphan in the frantic rage of grief can call upon you, to reſtore a father or a huſband who has thrown away his *life,* and all their *happineſs* in

in the moſt diſhonorable and moſt unrighteous of all cauſes, in lifting up his hand againſt the *authority* of the *mildeſt* of conſtitutions, and the *juſt rights* of the *beſt* of ſovereigns?

But ſhould ſuch a fair proſpect of peace and reconciliation retire far from us, ſhould the foundations of this our earth be ſo far gone out of courſe, as not to be reeſtabliſhed within the period that Providence has aſſigned to human life; yet ſtill I proteſt by all the *divine honors* that are paid to him, who before Pontius Pilate witneſſed a good confeſſion; by all *the bright beams of fame* which incircle ſo great a cloud of witneſſes; I proteſt by all the *precious promiſes* that are made to the faithful and the perſevering, and by all the *horrid woes* that are denounced againſt the fearful and the unbelieving, *you have not erred.* The man who hath reſiſted even unto blood in ſtriving againſt this unnatural conſpiracy, hath not *died as a fool doeth,* nor hath he who hath patiently ſuffered the ſpoiling of his goods, for the teſtimony of a good conſcience, in the leaſt deviated from his true intereſt.

As long as there is a God that judgeth in the earth, as long as there is an everlaſting kingdom prepared for the juſt, ſo long will it be the intereſt of every good man to hold faſt his integrity and not to let it go, though he ſhould be obliged to part with every thing elſe;

elſe; and ſo long will even the unſucceſsful ſtruggles of virtue be *more excellent than the mountains of robbers.*

When the ſtorms of adverſity ariſe, the good man can bid defiance to their rudeſt blaſts, wrapped up and incircled in his own integrity. When outward ſprings of comfort are dried up, he can be ſatisfied from himſelf, from a conſciouſneſs of his own uprightneſs, and from a ſenſe of the favor and approbation of the Supreme Being.

A good chriſtian engaged in a good cauſe can upon better principles adopt the language of a gallant Roman, *If I ſucceed, my friends, we ſhall all have occaſion to rejoice; if not, yet Brutus ſhall rejoice.*

When called to ſuffer according to the will of God, the true chriſtian will reflect that he is only called to tread in the ſteps of the great captain of his ſalvation, who was made perfect through ſuffering; who when ſurrounded by a ſea of trouble, yet did not let go *the cauſe that he had in hand*, but ſet his face forward like the flint, and did not fail, neither was diſcouraged, until he had brought forth judgment unto victory.

Amidst the moſt inſolent triumphs of ſucceſsful wickedneſs, he will not fret himſelf becauſe of evil doers, for *he hath ſeen that their day is coming*, he is aſſured by

God that cannot lie, that *the wicked ſhall ſoon be cut down as the graſs, and wither as the green herb.* By faith he anticipates the glorious and terrible day, when the Son of God ſhall viſibly deſcend to bring the wickedneſs of the wicked to a fearful and a perpetual end, and to eſtabliſh the juſt in the abundance of peace; then ſhall that ſoul which hath long been filled with the ſcorn of thoſe [illegible] are at eaſe, and with the deſpiteſulneſs of the proud, be made to hear the *joyful ſound*, infinitely ſweeter than the harps of angels, *well done, good and faithful ſervant, enter thou into the joys of thy Lord.*

Now to God, &c.

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